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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002857

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SUBJECT: KADYROV: SHARP DROP IN KIDNAPPINGS IN CHECHNYA

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice Wells.  
Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Kidnappings in Chechnya have dropped substantially this year with Ramzan Kadyrov's ascent to the presidency. The human rights NGO Memorial has recorded 17 abductions during the first five months of 2007, with none in April. This compares with 187 kidnappings in 2006. Human rights contacts attribute the dramatic improvement to Kadyrov's personal intervention but stress that the Chechen strongman is attempting to polish his image while adding leverage to his own Chechenization efforts. Kadyrov remains hostile to human rights organizations and recently threatened a Memorial representative, and personally has intervened to thwart investigations by the regional prosecutor's office. Overall, human rights remains poor, with U.S. assistance continuing to address vital needs. END SUMMARY.

KADYROV CONVERTED?

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¶2. (C) Memorial has documented 17 kidnappings through May 2007, the lowest figure since the second Chechen conflict began in 1999. Of those, 10 were reported in January, three each in February and March, and one in May. In April, Memorial documented no kidnappings. Of the 17 victims, 11 were either freed or ransomed. One was found dead and three others have disappeared. In 2006, Memorial recorded 187 kidnappings, with 63 victims disappeared and 11 found murdered. In 2005, there were 323 kidnappings, of which 25 people were murdered and 128 disappeared.

¶3. (C) Human rights activists attribute the marked improvement to Chechen President Kadyrov and believe he has ordered Chechen security forces to stop such operations. Memorial's Aleksandr Cherkasov said that Kadyrov most likely issued the order in January, as it became clear that he would become president of the republic. Memorial and other human rights groups have consistently documented that units loyal to Kadyrov were responsible for a large percentage of kidnappings and other human rights violations in the republic during the past two years. There have been periodic allegations that Kadyrov has personally committed abuses, and none of our contacts have ever doubted Kadyrov's personal responsibility. Memorial's Oleg Orlov said that such a sudden change only proves that Kadyrov is the ultimate authority in the republic.

¶4. (C) Kadyrov's order to stop abuses was politically calculated, our contacts tell us, and does not represent a dramatic conversion in which he embraced human rights principles. To the contrary, on May 30, Kadyrov summoned representatives from about 30 local human rights organizations to a meeting in Grozny. During the meeting, he singled out Memorial, complaining that its reporting of human rights violations was intended to undermine his administration, to destabilize Chechnya, and to further the political agenda of its Western donors. Orlov said that

Kadyrov was especially upset over reports that he was extorting money from Chechen businessmen and public employees in Chechnya as "contributions" to the Akhmed Kadyrov Fund that is often credited with funding reconstruction projects. Kadyrov also complained that Memorial had alleged he had a hand in the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya. Kadyrov warned Shamil Tangeev, the Memorial representative at the meeting, that Memorial's criticism of his administration and allegations of Chechen Government security forces involvement in human rights abuses should stop. Kadyrov's rant, broadcast on local television, ended with a thinly veiled threat to Tangeev.

¶15. (C) Orlov told us that Memorial is considering whether to pull Tangeev out of Chechnya for his safety. Memorial would not close down its operations, Orlov stressed. Demos Center's Tanya Lokshina said separately that human rights activists are concerned that Kadyrov, or someone acting on his behalf, might act against the organization.

NOT SO MUCH

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¶16. (C) According to our contacts, any improvement in the human rights situation in Chechnya is a welcome development, regardless of the motivation. The sharp drop in abductions, combined with reconstruction and Kadyrov's populist rhetoric, are resonating with the population, boosting Kadyrov's stature and support within the republic. Kadyrov has pointed his finger at federal MVD units, especially the Operative Search Bureau-2 (ORB-2) detachment in Grozny, which has a record of illegal detentions, abductions, and torture. Civic Assistance Chair Svetlana Gannushkina, who just returned from Chechnya, told us that there is a new atmosphere in the

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republic, in part because Kadyrov is skillfully and subtly playing on themes of Chechen self-sufficiency and national pride. To see Grozny now compared with what it had been in 2004 could almost be described as "a Chechen miracle," she said. Kadyrov deserved some credit for bringing about improvements, she added, but the fact that Kadyrov had blood on his hands had not changed. Nonetheless, the climate of fear that human rights activists often described is dissipating, Gannushkina said.

¶17. (C) Kadyrov's efforts extend beyond simply trying to polish his image. Orlov and others said his broader strategy is to bring all law enforcement and judicial organs under his control because he sees them as potential levers that could be used against him. Kadyrov's priority is to have ORB-2 withdrawn from Chechnya. That is why he is playing on its involvement in torture and other abuses. Furthermore, Kadyrov is attempting to cripple the work of the regional Prosecutor General's Office because of its recent, serious efforts to bring criminal cases against some Chechen law enforcement officers for torture and abductions. Demos Center's Tanya Lokshina said Kadyrov had personally intervened with the family of Malika Saltaeva, a young Chechen woman abused by officers of the Chechen Anti-Terrorism Center in 2006 and whose story was featured in The New York Times, when prosecutors brought charges against three of the men who assaulted her. The family agreed to drop the charges in return for compensation and a public apology at Kadyrov's urging. (NOTE: Memorial and Lokshina had approached us about refugee status for Saltaeva. They believed her life was at risk because she cooperated with prosecutors. Orlov told us June 13 that Saltaeva had broken off contacts with Memorial and apparently does not want to pursue resettlement following the agreement reached with Kadyrov. END NOTE.) There are even rumors that the Prosecutor General's office has a complaint against Kadyrov for involvement in torture, although none of our contacts believed that Kadyrov was likely to be charged.

COMMENT

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¶8. (C) Despite a decrease in kidnappings and progress in Chechnya's reconstruction, human rights and rule of law remain poor and subject to the vicissitudes of the Chechen strongman. Kadyrov remains a brutal thug, but one who now sees some political gain in marginally cleaning up his act. His consolidation of power and his well-known capriciousness could easily lead to the resumption of kidnappings and other human rights abuses just as quickly as they ceased. Our assistance, channeled largely through the UN agencies, continues to address the vital needs of Chechnya's population who still lack access to basic services and legal protections.

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